



PRESS RELEASE

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FIVE MEXICAN MEN PLEAD GUILTY TO HOSTAGE TAKING CHARGES

TUCSON, Ariz. - The United States Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona announced that on May 17, 2004, Andres Torres-Castro, DOB 11/9/82, Jesus Manuel Palma - Soto, DOB 3/25/85, Eduardo Loriel Soto, DOB 12/9/78, Jesus Ernesto Solis-Torres, DOB 11/6/86, and Francisco Verdugo-Fernandez, DOB 10/4/77, of Mexico, pled guilty to Conspiracy to Commit Hostage Taking in federal district court in Tucson, Ariz.

The defendants had been charged with violating Title 18 of the United States Code, Section 1203. On March 29, 2004 the defendants approached a group of 23 undocumented aliens who were walking through the desert near Three Points, Ariz. The defendants had numerous firearms, including a rifle and more than one handgun. The defendants ordered the group to lay on the ground while they robbed them. The defendants told the group that they would be taken to a nearby trailer where members of the group could contact a family member to pay a ransom. One member of the group escaped and made contact with a Department of Public Safety officer at the junction of State Routes 86 and 286. The subject then led U.S. Border Patrol officers to the area where the group was last seen and they were eventually able to locate

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the group still in the desert. The five defendants fled the scene but were later apprehended. Border Patrol recovered a rifle, a .38 caliber handgun and numerous rounds of ammunition.

The United States Attorney's Office is working closely with agencies under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to prosecute human smugglers identified as part of the Arizona Border Control (ABC) initiative. "When people treat others inhumanely, their cases will be vigorously prosecuted," said Paul Charlton, U.S. Attorney for the District of Arizona.

ABC is a comprehensive law enforcement effort launched by DHS in March to deter the illicit trafficking of people and drugs statewide. Agents from U.S. Customs and Border Protection Border Patrol and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) worked jointly on this case.

"This is yet another example of the victimization and intimidation that amount to business as usual in the human smuggling trade," said ICE Acting Special Agent-in-Charge Steve Minas, Jr. "The federal government has made an unprecedented commitment to put an end to this violence and cases like this show our joint resolve."

A conviction for conspiracy to commit hostage taking carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine or both. Depending on their criminal history, the defendants will be sentenced to 108 to 235 months imprisonment, according to the plea agreement. Sentencing is set before Judge Frank R. Zapata on July 30, 2004.

The prosecution is being handled by Gerard M. Guerin, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Tucson, Ariz.

CASE NUMBER: CR-04-4857M
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